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EJIRI. FROM THE HALF-PLATE SERIES OF THE TOKAIDO GOJU SAN TSUGI. "FIFTY-THREE POST STATIONS OF THE TOKAIDO," PUBLISHED BY SANOKI. THIS SERIES IS ALSO KNOWN AS THE "KYOKA TOKAIDO" AS EACH SHEET CONTAINS A KYOKA (COMIC POEM). HIROSHIGE

The Landscape Color-Prints of Hiroshige

By CHISHIKI KOKORO TODOMERU

THE art of landscape might be said almost to embody the soul and spirit of Japanese pictorial expression. The Oriental artist seeks to have the landscape he paints retain something of the spiritual atmosphere that emanates from himself when he regards it, instead of striving to delineate the landscape merely in the external aspect that presents itself to his passing, even through attentive, visual comprehension.

To the Occidental a Japanese landscape painting or color-print is apt to appear as something quaintly exotic, exotically quaint. One of the Western

world will cherish an enthusiasm for Claude Lorraine, for Turner, and might be amazed at the presumption that would seek to place Sesshu the painter, Hiroshige the color-print master, in the galaxy with those immortals.

We must not imagine that the difference between pigments and the implements of the painter's art has created a difference in technique that is responsible for the difference in the style of the pictorial art of the East and that of the West. The difference lies far below that surface; it is based on the fundamental

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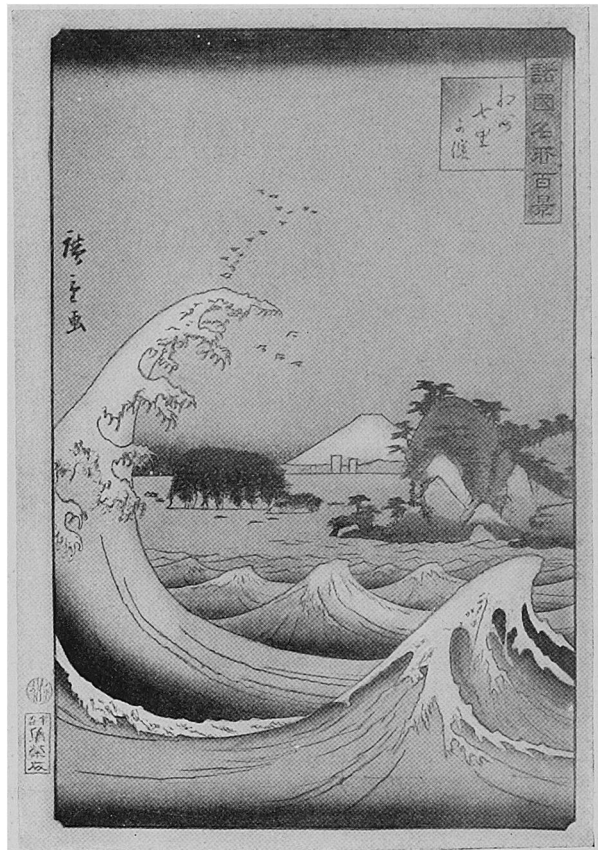


Metropolitan Museum of Art
ISHIYAMI AKI NO TSUKI—"MOONLIGHT ON ISHIYAMI."
FROM THE OMI HAKKEI. "EIGHT VIEWS OF LAKE
BIWA" SERIES. HIROSHIGE

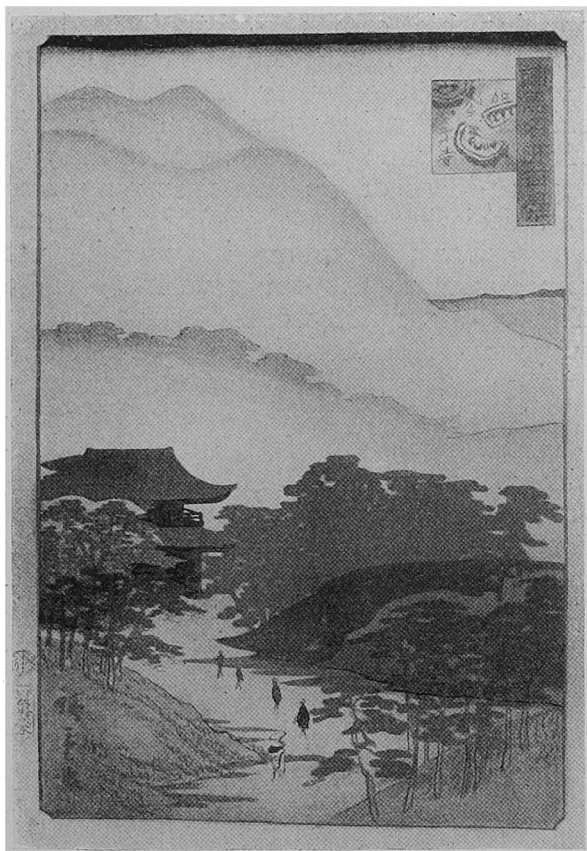
fact of the difference in mental approach to art between Oriental and Occidental. There are many who do not know that the Japanese were acquainted with oil-color as early as the Seventh century, but rarely employed it for the very excellent reason that it was not fitted to present the sentiment the Japanese artist sought to express through his work. While, on the other hand, Europeans found oil-color admirably fitted to convey that of life which they wished their art to interpret.

Just what has this difference in essentials been? I think the answer may nearly be, the difference in view-point. If, as the Western art-critic Ruskin has said, "Painting is nothing but a noble and expressive language," then unquestionably a painting must, in some measure, express thought or it does not deserve our consideration. Is not the art of the hemispheres in accordance on this point? I think so! The difference, then, in the Eastern from the Western view-point is the difference between the view-point that is subjective and the view-point that is objective. I cannot do better than to quote here from an essay by Sei-Ichi Taki, the noted Japanese authority, to whom I make my grateful acknowledgment for all that I have learned from his writings, the words of this eminent critic: "To state the matter more explicitly, a painter may use the object he delineates chiefly for ex-

pressing his own thought, instead of revealing the idea inherent in the object itself. On the other hand, another painter may strive to bring out the spirit of the object he portrays, rather than to express ideas of his own that may arise in association with the object." Thus we see that Western art, in general, gives importance to the objective ideas while Eastern art mainly concerns itself with subjective ideas. It is this difference in view-point that has created such a difference in the conception and the execution of the art of Orient and of Occident. Western art holds human portraiture as the noblest theme—Oriental art gives landscape, birds, flowers, rocks and other things an equal regard in art. "The reason is not far to seek," says Sei-Ichi Taki, "it is simply this: Landscapes, birds, flowers and similar things may be



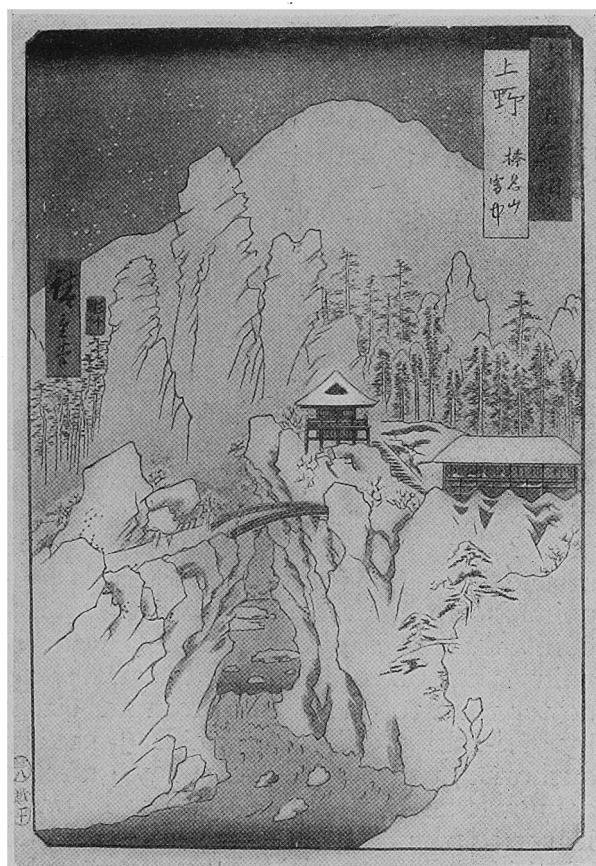
Courtesy T. Ito
THE SOSHU SHICHIRIGA HAMA. FROM THE SHOKOKU
MEISHO HAKKEI—"HUNDRED VIEWS OF THE VARIOUS
PROVINCES" ONE OF THE BEAUTIFUL SERIES PUBLISHED BY UWOTEI ABOUT 1853



KASHU KANAZAWA DAIJOJI. FROM THE SHOKOKU MEISHO HAKKEI—"HUNDRED VIEWS OF THE VARIOUS PROVINCES" SERIES PUBLISHED BY UWROYE

devoid of soul, but the artist may turn them into nobler objects, as his fancy imparts to them the lofty spiritual attributes of man. Any one with an extensive knowledge of our pictures cannot fail to discern this common characteristic of composition, namely that the centre of a picture is not found in any single individual object, for the guiding principle of the synthesis is expressed in the mutual relations of all the objects treated. In other words, in Japanese painting no serious attempt is made to give all-exclusive prominence to any one particular object, but, instead, the effect of the whole is considered the point of prime importance. Hence in the minds of our painters, not each and every portion of a picture need be accurate, but the picture as a whole should be microcosmically complete. Such is but the inevitable outcome of stress laid almost exclusively on subjective ideas."

The Japanese artist is not apt to add landscape as a decorative or pictorial accessory to his figures but gives to his landscapes the addition of such human figures as heighten the effect desired by the artist. A Western observer who has not yet come to understand Oriental pictorial art—to understand it is to appreciate it—is also apt to be somewhat perplexed to find Japanese landscape art so often presenting a bird's-eye view combining mountains, valleys, streams, oceans and natural features brought into the aerial perspective in a manner that strikes the uninitiated Western eye as fantastic if not, indeed, as distinctly incongruous. However, just in this, as Sei-Ichi Taki points out, there lies the peculiar advantage of the Japanese mode of landscape painting. For a scene of the most complicated nature can be treated with remarkable care and freedom



THE KOZUKE, HARUNA. FROM THE ROKUJU YOSHŪ MEISHO ZUYE—"SIXTY ODD PROVINCES" SERIES. PUBLISHED BY YECHEHEI. HIROSHIGE

when the chief sentiment of the picture is not concentrated on any one particular object, but finds expression in the organic relation of the whole."

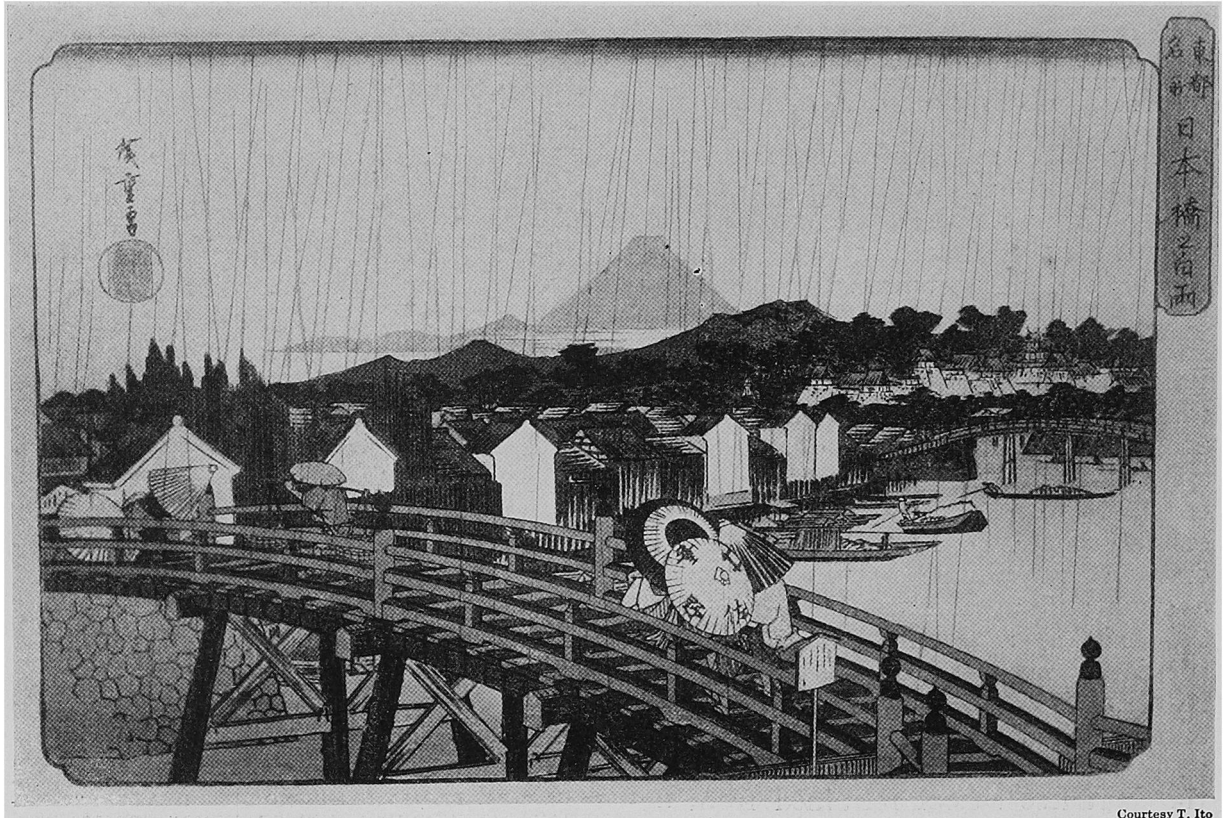
I realize that Western critics may challenge my contention that with the master-landscapists, Claude Lorraine and Turner, Ichiryusai Hiroshige (1796-1858) must be permitted to take place. But this is not an extravagant assertion nor an undeserved estimate. Only those who have not had inclination or opportunity to study Japanese art intimately, thus qualifying themselves to determine its relationship to the art of the world elsewhere, can consider the importance I would attach to the art of Hiroshige in the whole of pictorial landscape.

Arthur Morrison gives to Hiroshige the appreciation his art as a painter of the Ukiyoye school deserves. This writer also says of the Japanese master: "Hiroshige, with the simple and restricted means of the Japanese color-painter and a direct audacity of technique sur-



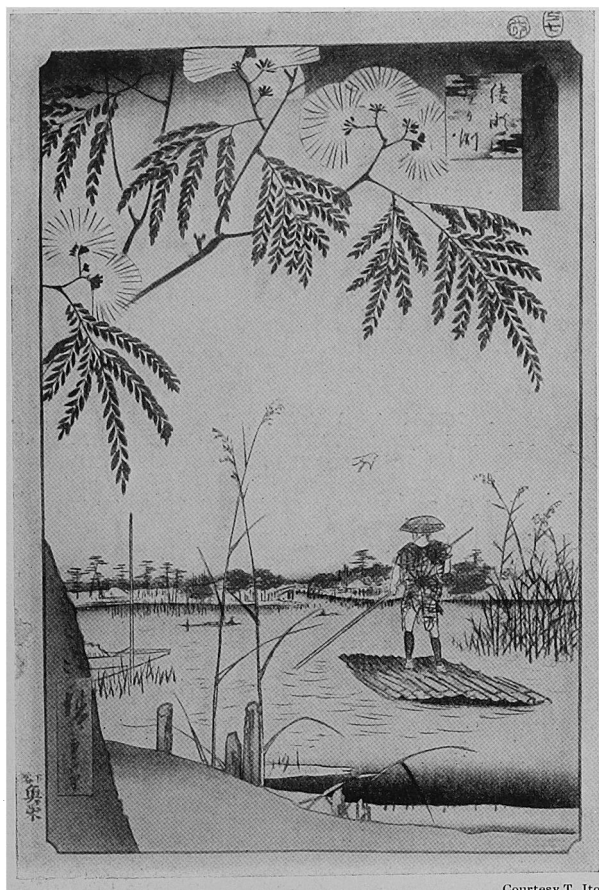
KAMBARA. FROM THE TOKAIDO GOJU SAN TSUGI.
"FIFTY-THREE POST STATIONS OF THE TOKAIDO."
HIROSHIGE

prising to analyze, carried the natural aspect of old Japan to live before our eyes forever." Fenollosa declared that Hiroshige's devotion to landscape was more single and his realistic process greater than that of others. "Hiroshige was an arch-impressionist," says this writer. "In special atmospheric effects, such as moonlight, snow, mist and rain, he achieved variety of effects such as



NIHONBASHI IN RAIN. FROM A TOTO MEISHO SET PUBLISHED BY SANOKI. HIROSHIGE

Courtesy T. Ito

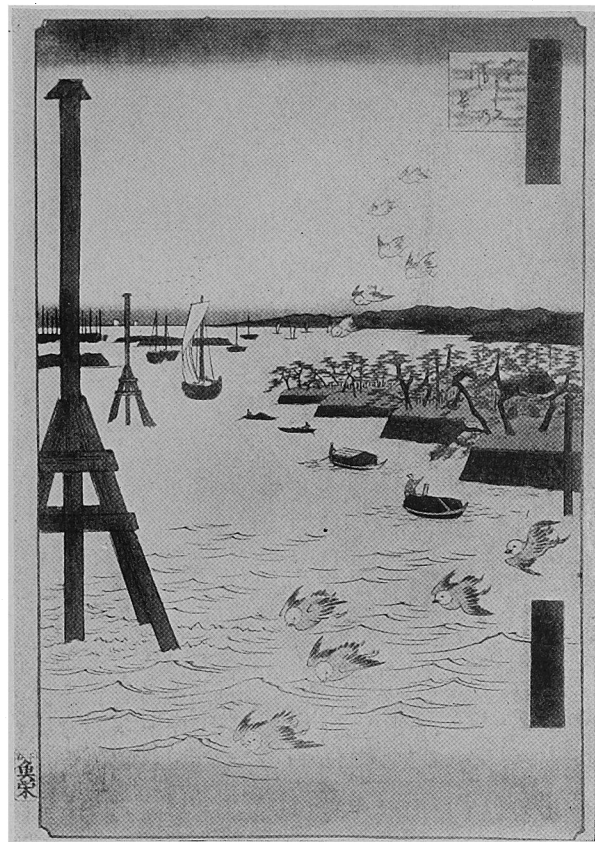


Courtesy T. Ito
AYASEGAWA. FROM THE MEISHO YEDO HYAKKEI—"CELEBRATED HUNDRED VIEWS OF YEDO" SERIES
PUBLISHED BY UWOWEI. HIROSHIGE

neither Greek nor Modern European art had ever known. As a painter of night he is without a rival, save Whistler. As is well-known, Whistler built his nocturnal impressions upon Hiroshige's suggestion."

Here, then is a master whom both Eastern and Western art-lovers can understand! How did it come about that Hiroshige, without deserting the spiritual significance of art as the Oriental considers this essence came to create an entirely new school of landscape that at once was intelligible to the Occidental, a style still peculiarly Japanese? Says Sei-Ichi Taki: "Laying his hand on the previously neglected themes of his native scenes, Hiroshige traveled far and wide and sketched the noted bits of scenery in this country while his landscapes of the Japanese school refrained from depicting Japanese scenery. The beauty

about him is that he never labored over trivial details, but always kept his eyes on the rendering of scenes in their broad and general aspects." Hiroshige's sole teacher was nature. His art lent to Japanese landscape something that before his day it had lacked. Hokusai may have been an architect in landscape, but in this art Hiroshige was a poet. He furthermore taught the Japanese certain beauties which I think they had not known before, beauties independent of intellectual enjoyment, beauties that did not, as with a landscape by Sesshu, require a vast cultural heritage in accord with profundities. Minoru Uchida wrote: "It is through Hiroshige's landscape that I learned to discover beauty in the colors of the sky and joy in the wind and the light of the hills. . . . And foreigners admire Hiroshige. Why? Not because he satisfies their curiosity for the unintelligibly strange, but because his



Courtesy T. Ito
SHIBAURA. FROM THE MEISHO YEDO HYAKKEI "CELEBRATED HUNDRED VIEWS OF YEDO" SERIES
PUBLISHED BY UWOWEI. HIROSHIGE

technique is so intimate and intelligible, being the universal technique of nature." Indeed, as Minoru Uchida affirms, Hiroshige, in contradistinction to Okyo, was the only nature artist of Japan who was faithful to Nature.

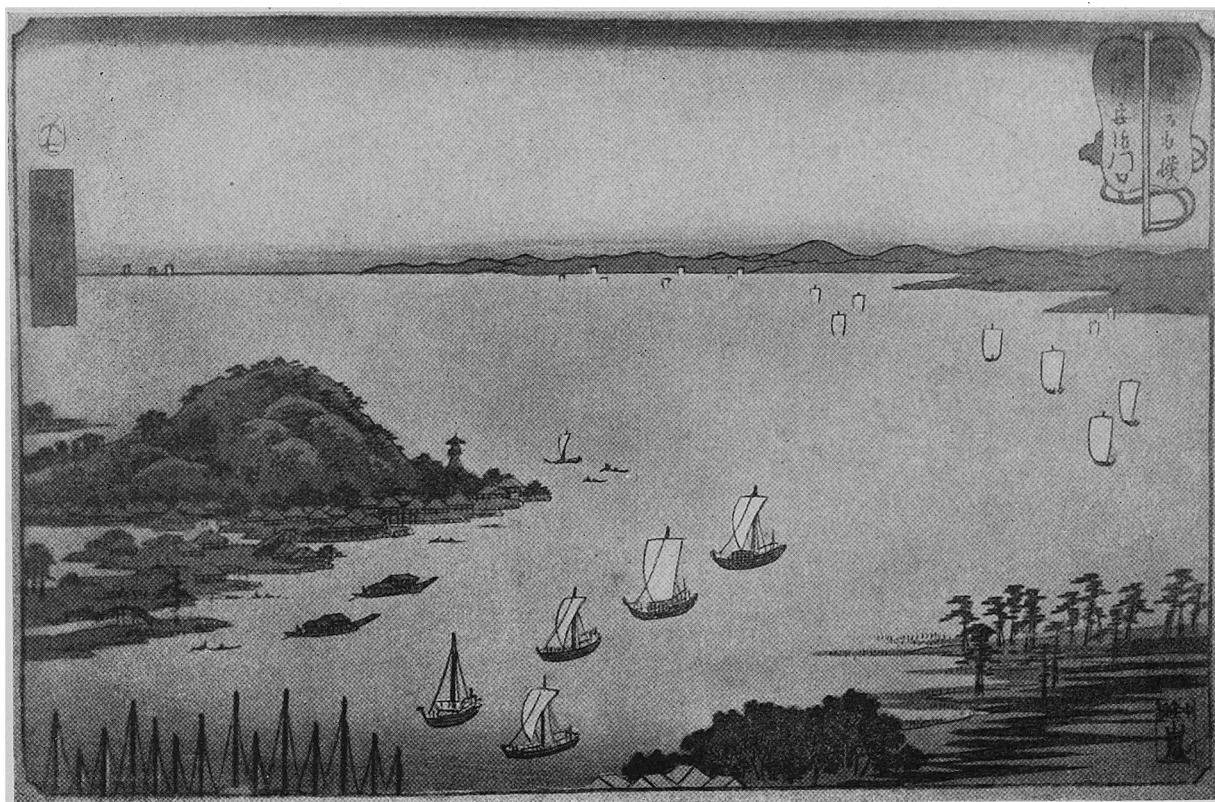
I think it a great pity that collectors of Japanese prints, many (not all) of them labor under the delusion that the landscape prints of Hiroshige are not worthy their attention. We must grant that no artist, not even Hokusai, Hiroshige's contemporary, but with whom he appears to have had no intimacy if, indeed, communion, was more prolific. Hiroshige's color-print subjects extend into thousands. Many of these were reprinted in later editions. Others were reprinted from worn blocks in crude



OISO. FROM THE MARUSEI TOKAIDO SET. HIROSHIGE

colors and so on. Notwithstanding all this, fine examples of the original editions attest Hiroshige's superb mastery of form and color and there is bound to come a time when perfect prints by this master will be as nearly unattainable as the

portrait prints of Sharaku. One has only to compare a Hiroshige print of fine quality with one of later issue, cruder coloring, to recognize at once how unfair it is to judge Hiroshige by other than his original edition work in fine condition, to observe how unfortunate it is that so many print-collectors have, by not taking the trouble to study this artist intimately, been misled by those who have underestimated Hiroshige's worth into slighting the work of this marvellous master of landscape.



SETTSU AJIKAWA GUCHI. FROM THE SANKAI MITATE ZUMO—"MOUNTAIN AND SEA COMPARED TO WRESTLING" SERIES PUBLISHED BY YAMADAYA, 1858. HIROSHIGE